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ABSTRACT

Multicultural education has become a controversial topic in recent years, and in the midst of such controversy, there has been little agreement on a precise conceptualization of multicultural education. It is apparent that it takes many forms. A typology is presented that divides multicultural education programs into three categories according to their primary emphasis. The first includes content-oriented programs, which are the most common and immediately recognizable approaches to multicultural education. In its simplest form, this type of program adds a multicultural gloss to a standard curriculum. More sophisticated versions actually transform the curriculum. The second category includes student-oriented programs that address the academic needs of defined groups of students, often minorities. The third category includes socially oriented programs that seek to reform schooling and the political and cultural contexts of education. Identifying these categories may help educators develop programs that reflect the diversity of their student bodies. (Contains 10 references.) (SLD)

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VARIETIES OF MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION

What we now call multicultural education originated in the 1960s in the wake of the civil rights movement as a corrective to the long-standing *de facto* policy of assimilating minority groups into the "melting pot" of dominant American culture (Sobol, 1990). Multicultural education has captured almost daily headlines in recent years, as it has become an ever-more contentious and politicized battleground. To cite just two instances, attempts to establish multicultural curricula in New York City and California were the subject of considerable public attention. In the debate over New York's *Children of the Rainbow* curriculum, opponents such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (1991) argued that multicultural education threatened to divide students along racial and cultural lines, rather than unite them as Americans. California's curriculum was met with strong attacks from both opponents and proponents of multicultural education; depending upon one's perspective, the curriculum either carried diversity too far, or merely bolstered the traditional curriculum's Eurocentric biases (Kirp, 1991; King, 1992).

The public debate continues. As recently as May 1994, a school board in Lake County, Florida, voted that its schools could teach children about other cultures, but only as a way of teaching them that American culture was inherently "superior," a decision much discussed around the country ("School Board," 1994).

In the midst of such controversy, there has been little agreement on a precise conceptualization of multicultural education; indeed, while some limit its applicability to curriculum, multicultural education has also been broadly defined to include "any set of processes by which schools work with rather than against oppressed groups" (Sleeter, 1992, p. 141). Even more sweeping, one scholar asserted that multicultural education can have an impact upon every aspect of a school's operation: staffing, curriculum, tracking, testing, pedagogy, disciplinary policies, student involvement, and parent and community involvement (Nieto, 1992). Clearly, multicultural education, as practiced in the United States, takes many varied forms.

Typologies of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education, however, cannot be all things to all people. Several attempts have been made to detail the various educational strategies that fall under the broad umbrella of multicultural education—to develop a "typology." A typology can provide a useful framework for thinking about multicultural education, giving educators—and others—a clearer understanding of what people mean by the term. Two of the most useful typologies, albeit different from each other, were developed by Banks (1994), and by Sleeter and Grant (1993). Drawing upon both those typologies, this digest presents a third typology in order to offer a brief summary of how multicultural education is implemented in the United States. It is intended for educators, policy makers, and others who are just beginning to consider multicultural education options; future digests will address more advanced issues.

The multicultural education typology presented here is comprised of programs that can be broadly divided into three categories, according to their primary emphasis. Each is discussed below.

Content-Oriented Programs

As the controversies in New York City and California suggest, content-oriented efforts are the most common and immediately recognizable variety of multicultural education. Their primary goal is to include content about different cultural groups in the curriculum and educational materials in order to increase students' knowledge about these groups. In its simplest form, this type of program adds a multicultural patina to a standard curriculum, perhaps incorporating a few short readings or a few in-class celebrations of cultural heroes and holidays within the school year. Other versions of content-area programs take a more thorough approach, adding numerous multicultural materials and themes to the curriculum.

More sophisticated versions actively transform the curriculum. According to Banks (1994), these programs have three goals:

- to develop multicultural content throughout the disciplines;
- to incorporate a variety of different viewpoints and perspectives in the curriculum; and
- to transform the canon, ultimately developing a new paradigm for the curriculum.

Such programs often take the form that Sleeter and Grant (1993) call "single-group studies"; common examples include black, ethnic, and women's studies programs. In some cases, single-group studies programs can play a major role in the transformation of entire schools, as, for instance, in the development of independent Afrocentric schools (Shujaa, 1992). Some schools have also created single-gender classrooms, designed specifically to meet the educational needs of girls away from the distractions of a mixed-gender situation. Afrocentric schools and single-gender classroms, thus, combine elements from content-oriented programs with aspects of student-oriented programs, described below.

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Student-Oriented Programs

Because multicultural education is an effort to reflect the growing diversity of America's classrooms, many programs move beyond curricular revisions to specifically address the academic needs of carefully defined groups of students, often minority students. Primarily, as Banks (1994) notes, while curricular programs attempt to increase the body of knowledge about different ethnic, cultural, and gender groups, student-oriented programs are intended to increase the academic achievement of these groups, even when they do not involve extensive changes in the content of the curriculum.

As Sleeter and Grant (1993) describe them, many of these programs are designed not to transform the curriculum or the social context of education, but to help culturally or linguistically different students make the transition into the educational mainstream. To do this, these programs often draw upon the varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds of their student bodies.

As a result, student-oriented programs can, themselves, take many forms, some of which are not typically thought of as types of multicultural education. Banks (1994) outlines four broad program categories:

- programs that use research into culturally-based learning styles in an attempt to determine which teaching styles to use with a particular group of students;
- bilingual or bicultural programs;
- language programs built upon the language and culture of African-American students; and
- special math and science programs for minority or female students.

As a result of this variety—and because they attempt to help students make the transition into the mainstream—many student-oriented programs can be viewed as compensatory in nature; in fact, they can often be nearly indistinguishable from other compensatory programs which may not be multicultural in their emphasis.

Socially-Oriented Programs

These programs seek to reform both schooling and the cultural and political contexts of schooling, aiming neither simply to enhance academic achievement nor to increase the body of multicultural knowledge, but to have the much broader impact of increasing cultural and racial tolerance and reducing bias.

According to Banks (1994), this category of program encompasses not only programs designed to restructure and desegregate schools, but also programs designed to increase all kinds of contact among the races: programs to encourage minority teachers, anti-bias programs, and cooperative learning programs. As Sleeter and Grant (1993) describe it, this type of multicultural education emphasizes "human relations" in all its forms, and incorporates some characteristics of the other two program types; that is, it can entail curricular revisions in order to emphasize positive social contributions of ethnic and cultural groups, while using research on learning styles to enhance student achievement and reduce racial tensions within the classroom.

But Sleeter and Grant (1993) also extend this type of multicultural education to include a much broader spectrum of programs with socially-oriented and social activist goals. The programs they refer to, which are much less common—and which can be much more controversial—emphasize pluralism and cultural equity in the American society as a whole, not simply within the schools. In order to reach their goals, such programs can employ a number of approaches. Many emphasize the application of critical thinking skills to a critique of racism, sexism, and other repressive aspects of American society; some emphasize multilingualism; others attempt to examine issues from a large number of viewpoints different from that of the predominant culture; still others can utilize cooperative learning approaches and decision-making skills in order to prepare students to become socially-active citizens.

Conclusion

These clearly drawn categories of multicultural education may facilitate educators' attempts to develop programs that reflect the diversity of their student body. Public articulation of the programs and goals of specific approaches can help to temper some of the political rhetoric surrounding multicultural education, and give educators and policy makers on all sides of the issue a common basis for their discussions.

— Gary Burnett

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